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**IN THE  
Supreme Court of the United States**

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**OCTOBER TERM, 1982**

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**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA ex rel.  
GERALD JEROME ROCK,**  
*Petitioner-Appellant,*

**-VS.-**

**PHILLIP COOMBE, JR., Superintendent,**  
*Respondent-Appellee.*

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**PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI  
TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE SECOND CIRCUIT**

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**QUESTION PRESENTED**

Did the Court below err in holding that a presumption-of-intent instruction is harmless error where the trial court otherwise properly instructed the jury?

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**PHILLIP COOMBE, JR., Superintendent,**

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**PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI  
TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE SECOND CIRCUIT**

Petitioner, respectfully requests that a Writ of Certiorari issue to review the judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit in Gerald Jerome Rock v. Phillip Coombe, Jr., judgment was entered December 2, 1982.

**CITATION TO OPINIONS BELOW**

The District Court's opinion has not been reported and is reproduced as appendix A to this petition. The Court of Appeals' opinion not yet reported, is reproduced as appendix B.

## JURISDICTION

In the habeas corpus proceeding, petitioner Gerald Jerome Rock challenges a judgment of the Supreme Court of the State of New York, Kings County, rendered on September 25, 1975 convicting him of the crime of murder. He is currently incarcerated at the Eastern Correctional Facility serving a sentence of twenty years to life.

## STATEMENT OF FACTS

### *I. The Prosecutor's Case*

Petitioner was charged in a Kings County, New York indictment (No. 2176/1974) with murder in the second degree in that petitioner on April 14, 1974, while acting in concert with other persons, with intent to cause the death of James Gibbs, Jr., caused the death of James Gibbs, Jr., by means of striking, hitting and beating him.

Kenneth Rush testified on direct examination that on April 14, 1974 at between 2:30 and 3:00 a.m. he was with petitioner, Daren Humphrey, Dean Barton, Anthony Barton and Darnell Mayo. The petitioner asked a man for a match but the man ignored petitioner. Tony Barton then jumped on the man and grabbed him. Daren Humphrey hit him with a garbage can and petitioner hit him several times in the head with a hammer. Daren Humphrey and Darnell Mayo also testified and their testimony was generally to the same effect.

Detective Bankhead testified that he arrested petitioner, Dean Barton, Anthony Barton, Jerry Brown and Daren Humphrey. A hammer was recovered at the scene of the incident by police officer Myles Lambert.

Dr. Wald, the medical examiner, testified that the deceased sustained multiple stab wounds and massive injuries to the face and skull; the latter was consistent with having been caused by a hammer. The cause of death was a stab wound of the heart and massive injuries of the face and skull.

## *II. The Defense Case*

Petitioner's sister, Florence Rock testified that she had spoken to Jerry Brown after petitioner was arrested and that he said that he had lied to Detective Bankhead when he told him that petitioner was involved in the crime. On May 7, 1974, she and Brown went to Detective Bankhead and when Brown told the Detective he had lied, Brown was arrested.

Jerry Brown testified that he was the one who killed the decedent with a hammer on April 14, 1974. Brown originally had told Detective Bankhead that petitioner had committed the crime, but on May 7, 1974 Brown told him that he was the one who used the hammer and petitioner had nothing to do with it.

Petitioner testified that he was eighteen years old, a student at prospect Heights High School and was never convicted of a crime. On April 14, 1974, he and Jerry Brown saw a crowd and Brown went over to the crowd; petitioner did not go over. Petitioner saw a group run after a man and Brown returned to petitioner, wiped his hands with a handkerchief, but did not tell petitioner what had happened. Petitioner never had a hammer or hit anyone.

On cross-examination, petitioner said he saw Dean Barton, Anthony Barton, Jerry Brown, Daren Humphrey and Kenneth Rush chase the deceased and petitioner walked away.

The prosecutor then asked petitioner if he were a member of the Tomahawks, a Brooklyn street gang. Petitioner denied he was a member. The prosecutor then asked him if he knew anybody in this gang, whether he was trying to get into the gang and whether his participation in the crime was in order to prove himself in order to get into the gang.

### *III. Rebuttal Testimony*

Detective Bankhead testified that Jerry Brown never told him he had hit the decedent with a hammer nor that petitioner was not involved.

### *IV. Summation*

The prosecution, in its summation, suggested to the jury that they could determine what petitioner's intent was by "—the results of his actions."

### *V. Requests to Change*

Upon the request of petitioner, the Court agreed to charge as a lesser included offense of Murder, the crime of first degree manslaughter.

### *VI. Jury Charge*

As part of its charge on intent, trial judge charged that it was

"a fundamental rule of evidence that a man is presumed to intend the natural consequences of his act, unless the act is done under circumstances or under conditions which preclude the existence of such an intent."

In addition, the Court instructed the jury that whether there was an intent to murder depended upon the jury's evaluation of petitioner's "speech, conduct and actions" also; "there may indeed be a death and it may be caused by some conduct of the defendant; yet it may not be a homicide and the defendant may be innocent of any crime." The trial judge also charged several times with respect to the burden of proof beyond a reasonable doubt. There were no objections to any of these instructions.

### *VIII. Jury Questions*

The jury first requested the rereading of the testimony of John Finley and Jerry Brown. This testimony was read.

The jury thereafter requested "—a reading of the Medical Examiner's testimony and that portion of the Judge's charge dealing with intent." The trial judge

as part of its rereading of the charge again said "—a person is presumed to intend the natural consequences of his act unless the act was done under circumstances or conditions which would preclude the existence of such an intent."

In the second day of deliberations, the jury again requested "—a reading of the charge dealing with intent and the difference between Murder and Manslaughter from the original transcript." The trial judge read verbatim the charge as set forth heretofore under VI. No objection was made to either rereading of these instructions.

Later that day, the jury returned a verdict of guilty of murder. Petitioner received a sentence of twenty years to life.

### **PETITIONER'S POST-CONVICTION—STATE COURT PROCEEDINGS**

Petitioner appealed the judgment of conviction to the Appellate Division of the New York Supreme Court, Second Judicial Department arguing: 1) whether the prejudicial remarks of the Assistant District Attorney and the prejudicial testimony elicited by him denied the defendant-appellant a fair trial; 2) whether the defendant-appellant was denied a fair trial where he was denied an adjournment or continuance for the purpose of calling two witnesses; 3) whether the Court committed error by refusing to charge the Crime of Assault; 4) whether the defendant-appellant's guilt was proved beyond a reasonable doubt. On June 28, 1976, petitioner's conviction was unanimously affirmed without opinion. Petitioner applied for leave to appeal to the Court of Appeals which was dismissed for untimeliness. Peti-

tioner made application to the Supreme Court of the State of New York, Kings County to vacate the judgment of conviction pursuant to §440.10 of the Criminal Procedure Law arguing: 1) the Court's charge on intent was improper in that it erroneously shifted that burden of proof to the defendant; 2) the prosecutor's remarks to the jury, coupled with his cross-examination of defendant were improper and violated defendant's right to a fair trial. That motion was denied on May 19, 1980.

### *Federal Court Proceedings*

The petitioner petitioned the United States District Court for a writ of habeas corpus arguing the following points:

1) The courts charge of intent was improper in that it erroneously shifted the burden of proof to defendant and allowed him to be convicted on less than evidence beyond a reasonable doubt;

2) It was reversible error for the Court to refuse to charge the crime of assault;

3) The Prosecutor's prejudicial cross-examination of petitioner, coupled with his erroneous and prejudicial remarks during his closing statement denied the defendant of a constitutionally fair trial;

3(b) The prosecuting attorney's erroneous remarks about defendant's clothing and on intent during closing argument were prejudicial and denied the defendant his right to a constitutionally fair trial;

4) Where the defendant was denied an adjournment for the purpose of calling a witness, the defendant was denied a fair trial.

5. The petitioner's guilt as required by the constitution, was not proved beyond a reasonable doubt.

The Court dismissed the petition finding points 2, 3, 3b, 4 and 5 to be without merit, but on the issue raised in point 1 granted a certificate of probable cause.

Petitioner appealed to the Court of Appeals, Second Circuit which, on December 2, 1982, affirmed the District Court holding that petitioner formally abandoned all but his *Sandstrom* claim but found that the giving of the *Sandstrom* instruction was harmless error beyond a reasonable doubt.

### SUMMARY OF THE ARGUMENT

The decision by the Court of Appeals raises an issue of such exceptional significance as to warrant review by this Court. The holding, while acknowledging that the presumption-of-intent instruction given in the case at bar was constitutionally improper under this Court's decision in *Sandstrom v. Montana*, 442 U.S. 510 (1979), nevertheless concludes that the giving of this improper instruction, once during jury instructions and twice more in response to questions during deliberations, was harmless error because of the trial court's otherwise proper instructions on intent. This decision by the Second Circuit is not only contrary to decisions in other Circuits *Mann v. U.S.*, 319 F.2d 404 (Fifth Circuit, 1963), *Dietz v. Solem*, 640 F.2d 126 (Eighth Circuit, 1981), *United States v. Winter*, 663 F.2d 1120, (First Circuit, 1982), but also a previous decision by this very Circuit, *Rivera v. Coombe*, Docket No. 82-2086, decided 6/29/82. Moreover, the holding violates the spirit of *Sandstrom v. Montana*.



It is most appropriate for this Court to finally provide the guidelines for when a *Sandstrom* presumption-of-intent instruction can be treated as harmless error under *Chapman v. California*, 386 U.S. 18 (1967).

## REASONS FOR GRANTING THE WRIT

### THE COURT BELOW ERRED IN HOLDING THAT A "PRESUMPTION-OF-INTENT" INSTRUCTION IS HARMLESS ERROR WHERE THE TRIAL COURT OTHERWISE PROPERLY INSTRUCTED THE JURY

The Court of Appeals herein, although recognizing that the presumption-of-intent instruction given to the jury in this case was improper under *Sandstrom v. Montana*, 442 U.S. 510 (1979), nevertheless held that the giving of this instruction was harmless error beyond a reasonable doubt relying on *Chapman v. California*, 386 U.S. 18 (1967). They based their conclusion on the fact that the trial court otherwise properly instructed the jury on the burden of proof and intent.

This Court's holding improperly interpreted and applied *Sandstrom*, supra, *Chapman*, supra and *Cupp v. Naughten*, 414 U.S. 141 (1973).

This Court, in condemning the 'presumption-of-intent' instruction in *Sandstrom v. Montana*, supra, reasoned that:

The fact that a reasonable juror *could* have given the presumption conclusive or persuasion—shifting effect means that we cannot discount the possibility that *Sandstrom's* jurors actually did proceed upon one or

the other of these latter interpretations. (emphasis added)

Id. at p. 519.

It is the existence of such a *possibility* that *Sandstrom* emphasized as its concern; not the probability.

This same possibility exists in the case before the bar. Indeed, the possibility that reasonable jurors could have relied on the *Sandstrom*-type instruction in determining the issue of intent is greatly enhanced in this case by the fact that the instruction was not only given to the jury once in the body of the trial court's original instructions, but twice more during deliberations.

That this instruction was twice repeated during deliberations in response to specific requests by the jury for a rereading of the charge on intent, makes it highly likely that the instruction would be especially memorable to the jury and play a prominent role in their deliberations.

The trial court's giving otherwise accurate and correct instructions on burden of proof and intent can not insure against the possibility of a reasonable juror using the *Sandstrom* presumption in determining the issue of intent.

Although the charge did also contain some instructive language which may have tended to be curative, we cannot say that reading the charge as a whole there was no significant possibility that harm was done. The fact that the court gave instructions that the prosecution must carry the burden of proof and as to the reasonable doubt standard of proof does not cure the

*Sandstrom* error present here since a reasonable juror could well have concluded that the presumption as to intent constitutes a method of satisfying the prosecutor's burden under *Sandstrom*.

*Ramirez v. Jones* (1st Circuit, 6/30/82), also see *People v. Getch*, *People v. Marr*, 50 N.Y.2d 456, 464.

In *Ramirez*, the trial court's instructions contained proper instructions on the burden of proof and intent. Yet in that decision, just months prior to the instant decision, the First Circuit held the *Sandstrom* instruction to be fatal error. The rationale distinguishing these two decisions constitutes a distinction without a difference.

It is not only in the Second Circuit that the courts have held that otherwise proper instructions on intent and burden of proof are insufficient to overcome the burden-shifting effect of a *Sandstrom*-type instruction. So have the First Circuit, *United States v. Winter*, 663 F.2d 1120, 1144 (1st Circuit, 1981), the Fifth Circuit, *Tyler v. Philips*, 643 F.2d 1095, 1098-99 (5th Circuit, 1981), *Mann v. United States*, 319 F.2d 404 (5th Cir., 1963), cert. denied 375 U.S. 986 and the Eighth Circuit, *Dietz v. Solem*, 640 F.2d 126, 131 (8th Cir., 1981).

In *Dietz*, the Court closely considered *Sandstrom*-type charges in the light of *Cupp v. Naughten*, supra. While *Cupp* generally requires that a single instruction to a jury "—not be judged in artificial isolation, but must be viewed in the context of the overall charge [citations omitted]" Id. at 146, it also recognized that a single instruction by itself can rise to the level of constitutional error.

The question is not whether the trial court failed to isolate and cure a particular ailing instruction but rather whether the ailing instruction by itself so infected the entire trial that the resulting conviction violates due process.

Id. at 147.

*Diétz* in applying *Cupp* to a *Sandstrom*-type instruction went on to say:

Thus it would seem highly probable that a burden-shifting or conclusive presumption is the type of instruction contemplated in *Cupp v. Naughten* as constitutional error by itself. This is not to say that there would never be a case where other instructions could mitigate the error, *but only an unlikelihood of such a possibility* [emphasis added].

Id. at 130.

Thus the Court of Appeals herein was incorrect in its determination that the *Sandstrom* error was harmless beyond a reasonable doubt under *Chapman v. California*, supra. *Chapman* requires a showing that there is no reasonable possibility that the improper instruction might have been used in determining the issue of intent. Also see *Fahy v. Connecticut*, 515 U.S. 85, 86-87 (1963).

The Court of Appeals herein relies on the otherwise proper instruction on burden of proof and intent to neutralize the effect of the presumption-of-intent instruction. However, there is no assurance that the jury did not, despite these proper charges, apply the *Sandstrom* instruction as its method of deciding the issue of intent.

Even though the trial court did give an accurate charge on the necessity of intent and the burden of proof, we hold that to leave the jury with that part of the charge complained of in this case was not cured by what was said elsewhere in the charge. Instructions to the jury must be consistent and not misleading. The fact that one instruction is correct does not cure error in giving another inconsistent one.

*Mann v. U.S.*, supra, at 410.

Also see *United States v. Driscoll*, 454 F.2d 792 (5th Cir., 1972).

There is no reason to believe that the jury in this case after being given inconsistent instructions used the proper standard in deciding the issue of intent.

### CONCLUSION

The Court of Appeals erred in its finding that the giving of the *Sandstrom* instruction was harmless error beyond a reasonable doubt.

Respectfully submitted,

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**APPENDIX "A" DISTRICT COURT'S OPINION**

**UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
EASTERN DISTRICT OF NEW YORK**

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**UNITED STATES OF AMERICA *ex rel.*  
GERALD JEROME ROCK,**

*Petitioner,*

**-against-**

**PHILLIP COOMBE, Jr., Superintendent, *et al.*,**

*Respondents.*

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**APPEARANCES:**

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By: **JANE MEYERS, ESQ.**  
Assistant District Attorney

**Attorney for Respondents**

## WEINSTEIN, CH. J.:

Petitioner seeks a writ of habeas corpus on a variety of grounds. Only one warrants discussion. The trial court stated "It is a fundamental rule of evidence that a man is presumed to intend the natural consequences of his act, unless the act is done under circumstances or under conditions which preclude the existence of such an intent." 557 (References are to printed record on appeal). It is the petitioner's contention that this charge constituted a shift in the burden to the defendant under the familiar ruling in *Sandstrom v. Montana*, 442 U.S. 510 (1979).

Set out as an appendix are pages 555-559 showing how this reference appeared in context of the forty page charge. Emphasis has been supplied. In context, the *Sandstrom* "error" does not appear to be misleading.

The trial court instructed the jury that whether there was an intent to murder depended upon the jury's evaluation of petitioner's "speech, conduct and actions." 557. The court also pointed out: "There may indeed be a death and it may be caused by some conduct of the defendant; yet it may not be a homicide and the defendant may be innocent of any crime." 555. The court repeatedly charged with respect to the burden of proof beyond a reasonable doubt. 548-49, 551, 554, 559, 562-63, 566, and 595. It emphasized the need to show "specific intention," in a way leaving no doubt of the people's burden. *See, e.g.*, 595.

The defense's posture from the beginning of the case was that the defendant while "there, didn't commit the crime," because somebody else did. 41. It should be noted too that the evidence as well as the

summation of the prosecutor repeatedly stressed the specific "intent" not on any theory of presumptions but rather on the repeated blows to the head with a hammer by the defendant-petitioner. 544.

In any event, the brutal and vicious circumstances of the deceased's death made the issue of intent academic. It was never the defendant's position at trial that he did in some way cause the death of the deceased and lack the intent to kill. Rather, the defense was predicated on the position that he was merely a bystander and played no part in the killing.

Under these circumstances, there was no reasonable possibility that the challenged instruction contributed to petitioner's conviction. Any error was harmless beyond a reasonable doubt. *Chapman v. California*, 386 U.S. 18 (1967).

Respondent urges that because a number of the contentions of petitioner have not been exhausted the petition should be dismissed under *Rose v. Lundy*, \_\_\_U.S.\_\_\_, 50 U.S. Law Week 4272 (1982). Since the only claim of substance is the one adverted to and that has been exhausted, there is no point in sending the petitioner back to the state courts to pursue fruitless and time-exhausting remedies which will not affect the final result.

The petition is dismissed. Nevertheless, these *Sandstrom* cases raise difficult and subtle issues requiring an analysis of the facts in each case. See, e.g., *Mancuso v. Harris*, \_\_\_F.2d\_\_\_, Slip Sheet 2177 (2d Cir. April 13, 1982). A certificate of probable cause is, therefore, granted.



The Clerk of the Court shall send a copy of this memorandum and order to petitioner, his attorney and the Assistant District Attorney in charge of the case, Jane S. Meyers. Upon completion of all appellate proceedings, he shall return the Transcript and briefs in the state court to respondent's attorney.

Dated: Brooklyn, New York  
May 3, 1982

s/B. Weinstein  
Chief Judge, U.S.D.C.

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE SECOND CIRCUIT



No. 369—August Term, 1982

(Argued November 3, 1982 Decided December 2, 1982)

Docket No. 82-2211



GERALD JEROME ROCK,

*Petitioner-Appellant,*

—v.—

PHILLIP COOMBE, Jr., Superintendent,

*Respondent-Appellee.*



Before:

TIMBERS, KEARSE, and PIERCE,

*Circuit Judges.*



Appeal from a judgment of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York, Jack B. Weinstein, *Chief Judge*, dismissing state prisoner's peti-

tion for a writ of habeas corpus on ground of constitutionally infirm instructions.

Affirmed.

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ALAN C. LIPPEL, New York, New York, *for  
Petitioner-Appellant.*

JULIE R. FISCHER, Assistant District Attorney,  
Brooklyn, New York (Elizabeth Holtz-  
man, District Attorney, Kings County,  
Barbara D. Underwood, Jane S. Meyers,  
Assistant District Attorneys, Brooklyn,  
New York, on the brief), *for Respondent-  
Appellee.*

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KEARSE, *Circuit Judge:*

Petitioner Gerald Jerome Rock, a New York State prisoner convicted of second-degree murder, appeals from a final judgment of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York, Jack B. Weinstein, *Chief Judge*, dismissing his petition for a writ of habeas corpus which contended, *inter alia*, that the trial judge's instructions to the jury, once in the main charge and twice in supplemental charges, that "a man is presumed to intend the natural consequences of his act," unconstitutionally shifted to Rock the burden of proof on the issue of intent. *See Sandstrom v. Montana*, 442 U.S. 510 (1979). Although Rock had exhausted his state remedies as to this *Sandstrom* claim, his petition also presented

other claims as to which he had not exhausted his state remedies. The district court dismissed the *Sandstrom* claim on its merits.

On this appeal we allow Rock to withdraw and abandon his unexhausted claims to comply with *Rose v. Lundy*, 102 S. Ct. 1198 (1982). On the merits of the *Sandstrom* claim, we affirm the judgment of the district court.

## I. BACKGROUND

In September 1975 Rock was convicted in New York State Supreme Court, Kings County, after a jury trial, of second-degree murder and was sentenced to a term of imprisonment of twenty years to life. The indictment charged that Rock, acting in concert with other persons, had intentionally caused the death of one James Gibbs, Jr., by striking, hitting, and beating him. At trial the State presented the testimony of four of Rock's acquaintances who were present at or participated in the attack on Gibbs. All four testified that Rock had hit Gibbs on the head repeatedly with a hammer. A hammer had been recovered by police at the scene of the crime, and the medical examiner testified that the cause of Gibbs's death had been a stab wound to the heart and massive injuries to the face and skull.

In defense, Rock contended that he had not caused Gibbs's injuries or death. He testified that he had never joined the melee in which Gibbs was attacked, that he had not had a hammer, and that he had never hit Gibbs or anyone else. Rock called as a witness his cousin Jerry Brown, who was then already imprisoned for the murder of Gibbs. Brown testified that it was he, and not Rock, who had hit Gibbs with the hammer.

### A. *The Trial Court's Instructions*

Notwithstanding his defense of nonparticipation, Rock requested the trial judge to instruct the jury on the crime of first degree manslaughter, a lesser-included offense within the crime of murder. Insofar as is pertinent to this case, a manslaughter charge under N.Y. Penal Law § 125.20 (McKinney 1975) requires proof of intent to cause serious injury but, unlike a murder charge under N.Y. Penal Law § 125.25 (McKinney 1975), does not require proof of intent to cause death.<sup>1</sup> The judge gave the requested instructions on manslaughter as an alternative to the second-degree murder count.

The court informed the jury that "[p]roof of intent to kill is a necessary element of the crime [of murder]," (Tr. 586), and instructed as follows on the element of intent:

Intent is the operation of the mind whereby a person aims to obtain the desired natural consequences or effect of his act. Intent is the state of mind with which an act is done, and it involves the use of the will. As we say, a mental operation cannot be photographed. It is silent and invisible to the human eye, but the intent of a person maybe [*sic*] ascertained from his conduct or speech or from a combination of

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<sup>1</sup> New York Penal Law § 125.25 defines murder in the second degree, in pertinent part, as follows:

A person is guilty of murder in the second degree when:

1. With intent to cause the death of another person, he causes the death of such person or of a third person . . . .

New York Penal Law § 125.20 defines manslaughter in the first degree, in pertinent part, as follows:

A person is guilty of manslaughter in the first degree when:

1. With intent to cause serious physical injury to another person, he causes the death of such person or of a third person . . . .

both, and it is a general rule that a man's actions and outward manifestations reveal an expression of his mind, and it is not always by word alone that a man expresses his intention. *It is a fundamental rule of evidence that a man is presumed to intend the natural consequences of his act, unless the act is done under circumstances or under conditions which preclude the existence of such an intent.*

If you conclude that the defendant committed the acts charged, then you must decide whether or not from all of the established facts, speech, conduct and actions by the defendant, [h]e intended to effect the commission of this crime.

Under the Penal Law, the word "intentional" is defined as follows: "A man acts intentionally with respect to a result or to conduct described by a statute defining an offense when his conscious objective is to cause such results or to engage in such conduct."

Now whether an intent to kill was formed is something that you must determine from all of the circumstances of this case. In connection with the element of intent to kill, you may consider the demeanor, the conduct and the action of the defendant surrounding the commission of the alleged acts as disclosed by the evidence.

(Tr. 586-88; emphasis added.) The italicized language forms the basis for Rock's *Sandstrom* claim. In describing the elements of manslaughter, the court also stated that "[i]t is not only the act; it is the intention that controls." (Tr. 592.)

Throughout his main charge the trial judge instructed the jury as to the nature of the prosecution's burden of

proof. He repeatedly stated that the State had the burden of proof (e.g., Tr. 581, 589-90, 592, 596), that its burden was to establish Rock's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt (e.g., Tr. 581, 582, 584, 589, 593, 596, 611), and that the State bore this burden with respect to each and every element of the crime (e.g., Tr. 589, 590, 592, 596), including expressly the element of intent (Tr. 589). The judge stated that the defendant was presumed innocent unless and until the State carried its burden of establishing guilt beyond a reasonable doubt. (Tr. 581, 593, 611.) The court reminded the jury that the jury was the trier of the facts. (Tr. 596-97.)

There was no objection to the intent portion of the court's instructions. Indeed, following the jury's departure, Rock's attorney stated, "The first thing I would like to do is to compliment Your Honor on what I consider to be a fair and decent and objective charge." (Tr. 612.)

#### ***B. The Supplemental Instructions***

The jury retired to deliberate on July 14, 1975, at 1:42 p.m. At 4:18 it returned to the courtroom with a request for a reading of the testimony of two witnesses: John Finley (one of the four who had testified that Rock repeatedly hit Gibbs with a hammer) and Jerry Brown (who had testified that he, and not Rock, had hit Gibbs with the hammer). After hearing the reading, the jury resumed its deliberations at 5:15.

At 9:30 p.m. the jury returned to the courtroom with another request, this time for "a reading of the Medical Examiner's testimony and that portion of the Judge's charge dealing with intent." (Tr. 620-21.) With respect to intent, the court responded as follows:

THE COURT: . . .

I told you previously that intent is the operation of one's mind; and in effect, intent is that state of mind with which an act is done and it involves the use of the will; and, of course, the intent of the person cannot be ascertained by any X-rays. It can be ascertained from the conduct or speech of an individual or from a combination of both, that is, the facts and circumstances surrounding the alleged act. That is what you would look to toward determining what the intention of a person is.

I told you that intent is an element of both counts of the indictment. Under the first count of the indictment it is necessary for the People to establish that it was the intention of the defendant acting in concert to cause the death of the deceased[,] that is, to kill the deceased.

Under the second count of the indictment there is no intent to kill but an intent to cause serious physical injury. And that would be under—I used the term “second count of the indictment.” It is not actually the second count of the indictment. It is a lesser included offense of the first count of the indictment which is murder.

Does that satisfy the request or shall I continue further?

THE FOREMAN: If you can continue further, make it more clearer.

THE COURT: Again, as we say that a mental operation—and that is what the intent is—a mental operation that you determine from the facts and surrounding circumstances are such, something that cannot be photographed and is something is again invisible to the human eye and it is something that



has to be determined from the surrounding circumstances or acts.

In regard to intent, I may add as I told you previously that a person is presumed to intend the natural consequences of his act unless the act was done under any circumstances or conditions which would preclude the existence of such an intent.

Intention, as I defined it, is, of course, a question of fact for you to determine within the legal guidelines that I am giving you. And again, intent is something that you have to determine from the circumstances of the case, from the speech and conduct of the defendant and others who allegedly—and the defendant and the surrounding circumstances attending the alleged crime.

And, in effect, keep in mind an intent is trying—I'm trying to give it in as clear-cut and layman language as I can—a person acts intentionally that is, performs an act intentionally when his conscious objective is to cause such result or to engage in such conduct.

And that is basically what the law defines as intent.

And again I advise you that it is a state of mind within which an act is done and it is for you to make that determination as to what the intent, if any, was from all of the surrounding circumstances. And in accordance with the law as I have given it to you, you are to, of course, utilize your experience and everyday common sense in making this evaluation in accordance with the guidelines that I have given you.

(Tr. 621-24.)

The jury retired to deliberate further at 9:48 p.m., but was immediately brought back at the request of defense

counsel in order for the court to make clear that the State was required to prove intent beyond a reasonable doubt. The court stated to the jury as follows:

THE COURT: Let me add if I did not state it initially but I believe I had that intent is, of course, a necessary element both under the murder count and under the manslaughter count and I distinguish between the two different intents required, and, of course, intent is an element of both counts and the burden is upon the People to establish by proof beyond a reasonable doubt that this intent has been—rather, that the intention was present, specific intention that I outlined to you with regard to both murder and manslaughter.

(Tr. 625.) The jury resumed its deliberations at 9:52 p.m. and continued until 11:35 p.m. when court adjourned until 10:00 a.m. on July 15.

On July 15, the jury resumed deliberations. At 11:32 a.m. it returned to the courtroom with a "request [for] a reading of the judge's charge dealing with intent and the difference between Murder and Manslaughter, from the original transcript." (Tr. 630.) The court commenced by restating the difference between the intents required for manslaughter and murder, and then repeated virtually verbatim the intent portion of its main charge relating to murder, which we have quoted in part A above. There was no objection by Rock's counsel.

The jury resumed its deliberations at 11:41 a.m. At 4:55 p.m. it returned its verdict, finding Rock guilty of murder.

### C. *Post-Conviction Proceedings in State Court*

On his direct appeal to the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court, Rock challenged a number of aspects of his trial, but did not attack the trial court's instructions as to intent on the basis that they shifted the burden on that issue to him. His conviction was affirmed in 1976.

After the Supreme Court's 1979 decision in *Sandstrom v. Montana*, *supra*, Rock moved in state court pursuant to N.Y. Crim. Proc. Law § 440.10[1](h) (McKinney 1971) to vacate the judgment of conviction, asserting (1) a claim of prosecutorial misconduct in cross-examination and (2) a *Sandstrom* claim that the trial court's instructions on intent improperly shifted to Rock the burden on that issue. While finding that Rock was precluded from asserting his claims of prosecutorial misconduct (either because they had been raised on direct appeal and thus could not be attacked collaterally or because they had not been raised on direct appeal and thus were waived), the court reached the merits of Rock's *Sandstrom* claim. The court found that the "instruction read in the entirety, made it abundantly clear that the burden of proof was not shifted to the defendant but was borne by the People requiring proof beyond a reasonable doubt as to every element of each crime involved," that Rock's guilt had been overwhelmingly established, and that any error in the charge had been harmless beyond a reasonable doubt. The court thus denied Rock's motion to vacate the judgment. Leave to appeal this ruling to the Appellate Division was denied.

### D. *The Present Habeas Proceeding*

In November 1981 Rock commenced the present proceeding seeking a writ of habeas corpus in the district court. In addition to the *Sandstrom* claim, the petition

asserted claims of prosecutorial misconduct, improper denial of a continuance, erroneous refusal to instruct the jury on the crime of assault, and insufficiency of the evidence. The State, in addition to opposing the petition on its merits, contended that Rock had not exhausted his state remedies and that the petition should be dismissed under *Rose v. Lundy*, *supra*.

The district court declined to dismiss the petition on *Rose v. Lundy* grounds, stating that "[s]ince the only claim of substance is the [*Sandstrom* claim] and that has been exhausted, there is no point in sending the petitioner back to the state courts to pursue fruitless and time-exhausting remedies which will not affect the final result." District court memorandum dated May 3, 1982, at 3-4. Instead, the court dismissed the *Sandstrom* claim on its merits, ruling that Rock's trial defense had not placed intent in issue and concluding that, in the context of the trial court's repeated admonitions with respect to reasonable doubt and the State's burden of proof, "the *Sandstrom* 'error' does not appear to be misleading." *Id.* at 2. The district court did not mention the trial judge's repetition of the "*Sandstrom* error" in the two supplemental charges in response to questions from the jury. The court granted a certificate of probable cause, stating that "these *Sandstrom* cases raise difficult and subtle issues requiring an analysis of the facts in each case." *Id.* at 4.

#### E. Issues on this Appeal

On this appeal we are presented with issues not only as to the merit of Rock's *Sandstrom* claim, but also as to the threshold question of whether, in light of *Rose v. Lundy*, *supra*, that claim may be adjudicated in this proceeding. Rock seeks to pursue in this Court only his *Sandstrom* claim, as to which both sides now agree that Rock has

exhausted his state remedies.<sup>2</sup> Rock's present attorney, who is not the attorney who represented Rock in the district court, has advised this Court under oath that Rock wishes to withdraw and abandon his non-*Sandstrom* claims.<sup>3</sup> The State opposes any withdrawal or abandonment of the unexhausted claims on appeal, preferring a dismissal of all claims pursuant to *Rose v. Lundy*.

We conclude that Rock may, consistent with *Rose v. Lundy*, abandon his unexhausted claims in this Court in order that we may adjudicate his *Sandstrom* claim; and we conclude that the *Sandstrom* claim lacks merit.

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<sup>2</sup> The State originally contended, on the basis of incomplete records in the district attorney's files, that even the *Sandstrom* claim had not been exhausted and that Rock's pursuit of that claim was additionally barred by the doctrine of procedural default, *Wainwright v. Sykes*, 433 U.S. 72 (1977). Just prior to oral argument of this appeal the State obtained additional information and withdrew both of these arguments.

<sup>3</sup> Rock's attorney's affidavit reads, in pertinent part, as follows:

3. As I stated to the Court, on June 28, 1982, in a meeting between Mr. Rock and myself, we agreed that the only claim to be pursued on appeal was the *Sandstrom* claim; the other claims were to be abandoned.

4. Furthermore, Mr. Rock in a letter to me dated October 22, 1982, advised me that he had requested the attorney who had represented him in the District Court "that those points [referring to the other four claims in the petition for a Writ of Habeas Corpus] be removed from the courts (sic) consideration."

5. Based on the aforementioned, Mr. Rock concurs with my statement at time of argument withdrawing and abandoning the four other claims contained in the Writ of Habeas Corpus. (Affidavit of Alan C. Lippel dated November 4, 1982; bracketed and parenthetical material in original.)

## II. ABANDONMENT OF UNEXHAUSTED CLAIMS

In *Rose v. Lundy*, *supra*, 102 S. Ct. 1198, the Supreme Court ruled that when a district court is presented with a habeas petition asserting both claims that have been and claims that have not been exhausted in state proceedings, the court "must dismiss such 'mixed petitions,' leaving the prisoner with the choice of returning to state court to exhaust his claims or of amending or resubmitting the habeas petition to present only exhausted claims to the district court." *Id.* at 1199. The submission of a "mixed petition" does not automatically sound the death knell of the habeas proceeding since the petitioner is entitled to amend his petition to submit only exhausted claims. *Id.*; *see also id.* at 1204.

We do not construe the entitlement of the petitioner to narrow his petition, in order to submit only his exhausted claims, as a right encased in rigid formality. If a petitioner, either *pro se* or through his attorney, unequivocally acknowledged to the district court, either in writing, or orally on the record, that he was withdrawing and abandoning his unexhausted claims, we would see no reason to require the court to go through the jejune exercise of dismissing the petition and requiring that a new piece of paper be filed. Thus, had Rock unequivocally announced in the district court his abandonment of unexhausted claims as he has done here, we would construe *Rose v. Lundy* to have authorized the court to proceed to the consideration of the merits of Rock's unexhausted claims.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The district judge was not, however, entitled to reach the merits of the *Sandstrom* issue in the posture of the case as it existed before him. *Rose v. Lundy* held that "a district court must dismiss habeas petitions containing both unexhausted and exhausted claims." 102 S. Ct. at 1205 (footnote omitted).

Nor do we read *Rose v. Lundy* as ruling that a petitioner's election to abandon his unexhausted claims may be made only in the district court. Plainly any such election should ordinarily be made at that level, because the district court should refuse to rule on any of the claims in a mixed petition. Where, however, the district judge has ignored the dictates of *Rose v. Lundy* and dealt with the exhausted claims on the merits, and where he has refused to hear the unexhausted claims, we consider it appropriate to permit the petitioner to withdraw and abandon his unexhausted claims at the appellate level.<sup>5</sup>

Here, in the face of Rock's express and unambiguous abandonment of his non-*Sandstrom* claims, no useful purpose would be served by refusing to hear the appeal until after a remand to the district court for entry of an amended petition excluding those claims. Such a remand would accomplish only the formalization of the abandonment of claims on which the district court has already refused to rule, in order to have that court reiterate its ruling on the exhausted claim it has already decided, with Rock returning to this Court to make the same arguments he pursues now.

Accordingly, we accept Rock's abandonment of his non-*Sandstrom* claims, and we proceed to the merits of the *Sandstrom* issue.

### III. THE SANDSTROM CLAIM

In *Sandstrom v. Montana*, *supra*, 442 U.S. 510, the Supreme Court ruled that a jury instruction that "[t]he

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<sup>5</sup> Where the petitioner has not clearly and unambiguously abandoned his unexhausted claims at either level, we have remanded to the district court for further proceedings in accordance with *Lundy*. See *Gulliver v. Dalsheim*, 687 F.2d 655, 659 (2d Cir. 1982).



law presumes that a person intends the ordinary consequences of his voluntary acts" violates the defendant's right to due process because it tends to shift to the defendant the burden of proof on the issue of intent and thereby to deprive him of the presumption of innocence. In the present case, the challenged language, stated to the jury three times, was that

a man is presumed to intend the natural consequences of his act, unless the act is done under circumstances or under conditions which preclude the existence of such an intent.

(Tr. 587, 623, 632.) On the first and last occasions on which this presumption was stated, it was described as "a fundamental rule of evidence." (Tr. 587, 631.) The first portion of the statement appears to run afoul of *Sandstrom*. Although it is qualified to some extent by the clause beginning "unless," see *Washington v. Harris*, 650 F.2d 447, 453 (2d Cir. 1981), *cert. denied*, 102 S. Ct. 1455 (1982), we do not regard that qualification as sufficient to cure the *Sandstrom* error.<sup>6</sup>

In order to determine whether the effect of the challenged language was to shift the burden on the intent issue to the defendant, we must evaluate the language in the context of the charge as a whole. *Cupp v. Naughten*, 414 U.S. 141, 146-47 (1973); *Nelson v. Scully*, 672 F.2d 266 (2d Cir.), *cert. denied*, 102 S. Ct. 2301 (1982).

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<sup>6</sup> The use of the word "preclude" in the ameliorating clause is itself troublesome. If, to avoid the presumption, the circumstances must *preclude* the presumed intent, it would appear that intent need not be proven beyond a reasonable doubt. An improved formulation would be that the jury

may infer that a man intended the natural consequences of his act, unless the act is done under circumstances or under conditions that raise a reasonable doubt as to the existence of such an intent.



Further, we must pay particular attention to the fact that the presumption language was twice repeated in supplemental instructions responding to the jury's requests for clarification on the issue of intent. *Bollenbach v. United States*, 326 U.S. 607, 611-12 (1946); *Arroyo v. Jones*, 685 F.2d 35 (2d Cir. 1982), *petition for cert. filed*, 51 U.S.L.W. 3260 (U.S. Sept. 21, 1982).

In *Arroyo*, we considered the effect of a statement that "people are presumed to intend the natural, probable and logical consequences of their acts," which did not appear at all in the main charge, but rather was given as the final supplemental charge in response to a jury request for clarification of the words "conscious intent." Recognizing the particularly telling impact ordinarily made by a supplemental instruction, and especially the last such instruction, we stated as follows:

A supplemental charge must be viewed in a special light. It will enjoy special prominence in the minds of the jurors for several reasons. First, it will have been the most recent, or among the most recent, bit of instruction they will have heard, and will thus be freshest in their minds. Moreover, it will have been isolated from the other instructions they have heard, thus bringing it into the foreground of their thoughts. Because supplemental instructions are generally brief and are given during a break in the jury's deliberations, they will be received by the jurors with heightened alertness rather than with the normal attentiveness which may well flag from time to time during a lengthy initial charge. And most importantly, the supplemental charge will normally be accorded special emphasis by the jury because it will generally have been given in response to a question from the jury.

685 F.2d at 39.

The mere fact that an erroneous statement appears in a supplemental charge, however, does not automatically mean that the jury has been unduly influenced by it. The supplemental charge itself should be viewed as a whole and the offending statement read in context in order to evaluate its likely effect on the jury.

On the facts of *Arroyo*, there was every reason to believe that the court's presumption language had made a special impression on the jurors. It was a brief and pointed statement; it was unaccompanied by any qualifying language whatever; the supplemental charge was the first occasion on which the jurors had heard the presumption language; the presumption language was the last statement they heard before returning to deliberations; and after hearing it the jurors required less than one-half hour to reach a verdict on a question that obviously had been troubling them for the prior six and one-half hours.

We find the circumstances of the present case to be materially different.<sup>7</sup> The first statement of the presumption occurred in the main charge, during which the judge told the jury repeatedly that the burden was on the State to establish every element of its case beyond a reasonable doubt. Further, whenever the presumption language was used, whether in the main charge or the supplemental

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<sup>7</sup> We do not, however, agree with the State's contention, relying principally on *Mancuso v. Harris*, 677 F.2d 206, 211 (2d Cir. 1982), that the *Sandstrom* error was harmless because intent was not in issue in the present case. Although the evidence presented by Rock at trial did not place his intent in issue, that issue was placed before the jury by the court's acceding to Rock's request that the jury be instructed on the lesser-included offense of manslaughter. While the evidence and the charge, standing by themselves, might not persuade us that intent was in issue, we must recognize that intent was a factor that was troubling to the jury, which returned twice to the court with explicit requests for a rereading of the judge's "charge dealing with intent."

charges, it was in the midst of a balanced statement that intent was to be determined from conduct, speech, and all of the circumstances. Thus, in the main charge the challenged sentence was followed immediately by the statement that

[i]f you conclude that the defendant committed the acts charged, then you must decide whether or not from all of the established facts, speech, conduct and actions by the defendant, [h]e intended to effect the commission of this crime.

. . . .

Now whether an intent to kill was formed is something that you must determine from all of the circumstances of this case.

(Tr. 587.) This was also, nearly verbatim, the concluding language of the second supplemental charge. (Tr. 632.)

In the first supplemental charge the challenged language was both preceded and followed by instruction that effectively nullified any burden-shifting effect. First, the court stated that intent

can be ascertained from the conduct or speech of an individual or from a combination of both, that is, the facts and circumstances surrounding the alleged act. That is what you would look to toward determining what the intention of a person is,

(Tr. 621), and stated that

it is something that has to be determined from the surrounding circumstances or acts.

(Tr. 622-23.) This immediately preceded the presumption language; and after the presumption sentence the court continued as follows:

Intention, as I defined it, is, of course, a question of fact for you to determine within the legal guidelines that I am giving you. And again, intent is something that you have to determine from the circumstances of the case, from the speech and conduct of the defendant and others who allegedly—and the defendant and the surrounding circumstances attending the alleged crime.

. . . .

And again I advise you that it is a state of mind within which an act is done and it is for you to make that determination as to what the intent, if any, was from all of the surrounding circumstances.

(Tr. 623-24.) Finally, at Rock's counsel's request this statement was augmented two minutes later by a reiteration that the burden was on the State to establish the specific intent alleged beyond a reasonable doubt.

Thus, unlike the *Arroyo* jury, the jurors in the present case were never presented with a statement of a burden-shifting presumption that was particularly memorable either for its inclusion in a very brief statement, or for its isolation, or for its position as the last words given them prior to the resumption of their deliberations. Here, the judge ended each set of instructions impeccably: The end of the main charge contained language reminding the jury that the defendant is presumed to be innocent; the first supplemental charge ended with a reminder that the State bore the burden of proving intent beyond a reasonable doubt; and the final supplemental charge ended with the statement that intent was a matter for the jury to determine from all of the circumstances of the case.

Finally, unlike *Arroyo*, the timing in the present case of the jury's return with its verdict provides no basis for

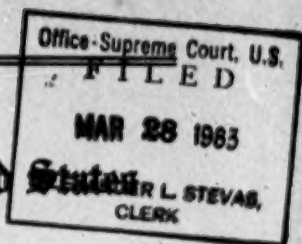
inferring that the jury seized upon the presumption language. Here, the last supplemental charge was given at 11:32 a.m., and the jury remained in deliberation for another five hours before returning its verdict of guilty.

In sum, in light of the court's constant reiteration that the burden remained on the State to prove each element of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt and that intent was to be determined from all of the circumstances, and in the absence of any basis for inferring that the jury fastened upon the presumption language instead of determining intent from all of the circumstances, we conclude that the *Sandstrom* errors were harmless beyond a reasonable doubt. See *Chapman v. California*, 386 U.S. 18 (1967).

The judgment of the district court is affirmed. The mandate of this Court shall indicate that petitioner formally abandoned all but his *Sandstrom* claim.

No costs.

IN THE  
**Supreme Court of the United States**  
October Term, 1982



**No. 82-1267**

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA ex rel.  
GERALD JEROME ROCK,  
*Petitioner,*  
*—against—*

PHILLIP COOMBE, JR., Superintendent,  
*Respondent.*

ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED  
STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE SECOND CIRCUIT

**RESPONDENT'S BRIEF IN OPPOSITION**

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**Question Presented**

Whether the trial court's charge as a whole, which explained how to find intent and repeatedly instructed on the prosecution's burden to prove every element of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt, shifted the burden of proof to petitioner in violation of this Court's holding in *Sandstrom v. Montana*, 442 U.S. 510 (1979)?

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ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED  
STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE SECOND CIRCUIT

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**RESPONDENT'S BRIEF IN OPPOSITION**

The respondent Phillip Coombe, Superintendent of the Eastern Correctional Facility, Napanoch, New York, respectfully requests that this Court deny the petition for a writ of certiorari, seeking review of the Second Circuit's judgment in this case.

The Second Circuit affirmed a judgment of the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York, dismissing petitioner's petition for a writ of *habeas corpus*. Petitioner is currently incarcerated pursuant to a judgment of the New York State Supreme Court, Kings County, convicting him of Murder and sentencing him to a term of imprisonment of twenty years to life.

## **Opinions Below**

The opinions of the Court of Appeals and District Court are not yet reported, and are reproduced in Petitioner's Appendix.

## **Jurisdiction**

The judgment of the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit was entered on December 2, 1982. This petition for certiorari was filed within 90 days of that date. This Court's jurisdiction is invoked under 28 U.S.C. § 1254(1).

## **Statement of the Case**

Petitioner Gerald Jerome Rock was convicted on September 25, 1975, after a jury trial, of Murder [New York Penal Law § 125.25]. This charge arose out of an incident in which petitioner, acting with seven other teenagers, attacked one James Gibbs, Jr., after Gibbs ignored petitioner's request for a match. Four of the teenagers all testified that petitioner repeatedly pounded Gibbs' head with a hammer, while one of the other teenagers stabbed Gibbs with a knife. The medical examiner testified that Gibbs died as a result of a stab wound to the heart and massive injuries to the face and skull.

Petitioner's defense was to contend that he had not participated in the attack. He so testified, and called as a witness his cousin, already imprisoned for the murder, who testified that he, rather than petitioner, had hit Gibbs with the hammer.

## **The Court's Charge and Jury Questions**

The trial court opened its charge to the jury by explaining that the jury is the exclusive judge of the facts and that, in judging the facts, they must determine whether

the People have met their burden of proving petitioner guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. Before reading the indictment, the court instructed:

The defendant is presumed to be innocent, and that means that the burden of proving his guilt rests at all times upon the prosecution, and that burden of proof is by proof beyond a reasonable doubt . . . .

The court then defined homicide and instructed the jury on the elements of murder.

As part of its explanation of homicide, the court stated:

There may indeed be a death and it maybe [sic] caused by some conduct of the defendant; yet it may not be a homicide, and the defendant maybe [sic] innocent of any crime.

It is therefore your duty to examine not only the fact of the killing and of the death, but also the circumstances surrounding it before you can determine whether or not the defendant is guilty of the crime presented to you for your consideration.

The court stated that intent was a necessary element of the crime which may be "ascertained from [a person's] conduct or speech or from a combination of both." The court went on to charge:

It is a fundamental rule of evidence that a man is presumed to intend the natural consequences of his act, unless the act is done under circumstances or under conditions which preclude the existence of such an intent.\*

If you conclude that the defendant committed the acts charged, then you must decide whether

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\* It is this statement to which petitioner now objects.

or not from all of the established facts, speech, conduct and actions by the defendant, he intended to effect the commission of this crime.

\* \* \* \* \*

[W]hether an intent to kill was formed is something you must determine from all of the circumstances of this case . . . .

[Y]ou must be convinced [sic] by proof beyond a reasonable doubt that intent to kill did exist at the time the fatal striking, hitting and beating occurred.

The court concluded its specific charge on intent by stating:

To find that the defendant had such intention you must be convinced beyond a reasonable doubt that it was his conscious objective to cause death and that the act or acts resulted from this conscious objective.\*

Throughout the remainder of the charge, the court continued to instruct that the People have the burden of proving every element beyond a reasonable doubt and that petitioner was presumed innocent.

Just before the jury retired to deliberate, the court again instructed the jury:

[D]id the District Attorney by credible evidence establish the guilt of this defendant to your satis-

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\* The court also instructed the jury on the lesser offense of Manslaughter in the First Degree, which requires an intent to cause serious physical injury and not the intent to kill required for murder. Both in its initial instruction and in a subsequent instruction pursuant to a jury request to explain intent, the court, in distinguishing the two counts, informed the jury that intent was an element of both counts and the burden was on the People to prove the requisite intent beyond a reasonable doubt.

faction beyond a reasonable doubt[?] That is the District Attorney's burden. The defendant again is presumed to be innocent.

At the end of the court's charge, defense counsel stated:

The first thing I would like to do is to compliment Your Honor on what I consider to be a fair and decent and objective charge.

None of defense counsel's three requests to charge concerned the issue of intent. No objection was made to any part of the court's charge.

During deliberations, the jury twice requested a reading of the court's charge on intent. Each time, in addition to stating the now challenged instruction, the court repeated that the jury was to determine intent from the surrounding circumstances and from petitioner's speech, conduct and actions. The first time, the court called the jury back to remind them that the People must prove intent beyond a reasonable doubt. Petitioner made no objection to the re-readings of these instructions or to the instructions themselves.

### **The Verdict and Sentence**

On July 15, 1975, the jury found petitioner guilty of Murder. On September 25, 1975, petitioner was sentenced to a term of imprisonment of from twenty years to life.

### **Post-Conviction State Court Proceedings**

On appeal to the Appellate Division, Second Department, petitioner did not raise any issue concerning the trial court's charge on intent. The Appellate Division unanimously affirmed the judgment of conviction, without opinion, on June 28, 1976, *People v. Rock*, 53 A.D.2d 703 (2d Dept. 1976), and petitioner's application for leave

to appeal was dismissed for untimeliness by the Court of Appeals on September 17, 1976.

Five years after his conviction, on April 24, 1980, petitioner moved to vacate the judgment of conviction pursuant to New York Criminal Procedure Law § 440.10. For the first time, petitioner claimed that the trial court's charge on intent shifted the burden of proof to him in violation of the rule of *Sandstrom v. Montana*, 442 U.S. 510 (1979). Specifically, petitioner objected to the following phrase, particularly the italicized portion:

It is a fundamental rule of evidence that a man is presumed to intend the natural consequences of his act, unless the act is done *under circumstances or under conditions which preclude the existence of such an intent.*

Petitioner's motion was denied on the merits on May 19, 1980, and leave to appeal was denied by the Appellate Division on June 21, 1980.

### **The Federal Court Proceedings**

On November 30, 1981, petitioner filed a petition for a writ of *habeas corpus* in the United States District Court for the Eastern District of New York, asserting, *inter alia*, that the trial court's charge shifted to petitioner the burden of proof on intent. On May 3, 1982, that court, addressing only the *Sandstrom* claim, found that the charge as a whole correctly stated the People's burden, and furthermore because there was no real issue of intent at trial, any error in the intent instruction was harmless beyond a reasonable doubt. The court dismissed the petition but nevertheless granted a certificate of probable cause.

On December 2, 1982, the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit affirmed the holding of

the District Court, holding that the trial court's intent charge, as articulated in both the main and supplemental charges, did not shift the burden of proof to the petitioner.

### **Reasons Why The Writ Should Be Denied**

#### **1. Neither the Decision Below Nor the Record Raises the Question of Harmless Error Presented by Petitioner.**

The court of appeals did not reach the question of harmless error presented by petitioner, because it concluded that the charge as a whole was constitutional under *Sandstrom v. Montana*, 442 U.S. 510 (1979). This Court, and lower courts, have looked to the charge as a whole, rather than to isolated phrases or sentences in evaluating a claim of *Sandstrom* error. See, e.g., *Cupp v. Naughten*, 414 U.S. 141, 146-47 (1973); *Nelson v. Scully*, 672 F.2d 266 (2d Cir.), cert. denied, 102 S.Ct. 2301 (1982); *Pigee v. Israel*, 670 F.2d 690 (7th Cir. 1981), cert. denied, 103 S.Ct. 103 (1982); *United States v. Tecumseh*, 630 F.2d 749 (10th Cir. 1980), cert. denied, 449 U.S. 961 (1981). In *Connecticut v. Johnson*, 51 U.S.L.W. 4175 (U.S. Feb. 23, 1983), this Court recently reaffirmed this approach, noting that the Connecticut Supreme Court had analyzed the charge as a whole in that case, and on this basis had found the charge as a whole unconstitutional. In *Johnson* the State did not challenge that finding in the United States Supreme Court, and therefore the only issue before this Court was harmless error. *Id.* at 4177 n.10. In the instant case, however, the Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit properly analyzed the charge as a whole and found no error at all. Thus, this case presents simply an instance of evaluating the language of an entire charge, in accordance with *Sandstrom*, and not any question whatsoever of harmless error.

Even if there were an issue of harmless error in this case, petitioner's claim would be without merit. In



*Connecticut v. Johnson*, 51 U.S.L.W. at 4178-79, this Court made it clear that a *Sandstrom* error may be harmless if, as here, there is no factual dispute at trial over the issue of intent.\* Although petitioner now claims that intent was an important issue in this case, at no time did petitioner contend as part of his trial strategy that he participated in the killing of Gibbs, but lacked the intent to kill. In fact, defense counsel specifically stated on summation, "Our defense is we had nothing to do with it." Indeed, it would have been inconceivable to argue that the person who brutally and repeatedly hammered Gibbs to death intended merely to inflict serious injury and did not intend to kill. This case thus falls within the harmless error exception recognized by *Connecticut v. Johnson*, and routinely applied by the lower courts. *Mancuso v. Harris*, 677 F.2d 206 (2d Cir.), cert. denied, 103 S.Ct. 382 (1982); *Rivera v. Coombe*, 683 F.2d 697 (2d Cir. 1982); *United States v. Winter*, 663 F.2d 1120 (1st Cir. 1981), petition for cert. filed, 51 U.S.L.W. 3022 (U.S. Jan. 22, 1982) (No. 81-1392); *McGuin v. Christ*, 657 F.2d 1107 (9th Cir. 1981), cert. denied, 455 U.S. 990 (1982).

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\* While the court of appeals rejected the harmless error analysis, that determination was, of course, dictum because that court found no error at all. Furthermore, the court of appeals was inconsistent and incorrect in suggesting that although the defense raised no issue of intent whatsoever, nevertheless intent was in issue merely because the trial court instructed the jury on the lesser included offense of manslaughter and because the jury asked questions about the court's charge on intent. Pet. App. at 21a, n.7.

## 2. The Court Below Correctly Applied Settled Principles of Law in Analyzing the Jury Charge in this Case, and Did Not Decide Any Question of Law Worthy of this Court's Review.

It is well-settled that in evaluating a claim of *Sandstrom* error, a court should analyze the trial court's charge in its entirety, rather than focus on isolated phrases. *Connecticut v. Johnson*, 51 U.S.L.W. at 4177. *Cupp v. Naughten*, 414 U.S. at 146-47; *Nelson v. Scully*, 672 F.2d at 271-72. The court of appeals was thus applying settled principles of law when it analyzed the charge as a whole in this case, and found that the charge was constitutionally sound. This case is utterly unlike *Sandstrom v. Montana*, which involved a one-sentence unqualified charge on intent in a case where the sole issue was intent, and *Connecticut v. Johnson*, in which the court, without further explanation, twice informed the jury of a "conclusive presumption." The charge here was elaborately explained and qualified, and could not have been interpreted by a reasonable juror as shifting the burden of proof to petitioner.

The court of appeals analyzed the intent charge as a whole, in accordance with this Court's recent holding in *Connecticut v. Johnson*.<sup>\*</sup> Its analysis was correct, and

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<sup>\*</sup> This Court specifically noted in *Johnson* that the Connecticut Supreme Court analyzed the trial court's charge as a whole, "[i]n accordance with *Sandstrom*." *Connecticut v. Johnson*, 51 U.S.L.W. at 4177. Thus, if *Sandstrom v. Montana*, *supra*, when read in conjunction with *Cupp v. Naughten*, *supra*, were not already dispositive of petitioner's claim, *Connecticut v. Johnson*, in approving the Connecticut court's mode of analysis, dispels all doubt as to whether an alleged *Sandstrom* error may be examined in light of the balance of the charge. *Johnson*, therefore, resolves any purported conflict among the circuits concerning the application of *Sandstrom*. Compare, e.g., *Dietz v. Solem*, 640 F.2d 126 (8th Cir. 1981) and *Tyler v. Phelps*, 543 F.2d 1095 (5th Cir. 1981), cert. denied, 102 S.Ct. 1992 (1982) with *Pigee v. Israel*, *supra* and *United States v. Tecumseh*, *supra*.

presents no issue worthy of review by this Court. As the court of appeals held, "whenever the presumption language was used, whether in the main charge or the supplemental charges, it was in the midst of a balanced statement that intent was to be determined from conduct, speech, and all of the circumstances." Pet. App. at 21a-22a.\* Furthermore, on each occasion, the challenged instruction was immediately followed by the qualifying language "unless the act is done under circumstances or under conditions which preclude the existence of such an intent." Pet. App. at 19a. The court also specifically informed the jury that although a death might be caused by a defendant, "it may not be a homicide and the defendant may be innocent of any crime," and instructed the jury that the People have the burden of proving beyond a reasonable doubt the presence of the "specific intention" for both manslaughter and murder. Additionally, the general language of the trial court's charge repeatedly instructed that the prosecution always retained the burden of proof beyond a reasonable doubt and that petitioner was presumed innocent. Finally, the court ended each set of instructions on intent "impeccably." Pet. App. at 23a. Thus, the court of appeals, in looking to the balance of both the specific charge on intent and the charge as a whole, correctly found the challenged instructions did not shift the burden of proof.\*\*

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\* Petitioner's claim that the supplemental charges compounded any error is without merit since the supplemental charges themselves did not shift the burden of proof.

\*\* The instant case is thus distinguishable from *Ramirez v. Jones*, 683 F.2d 712 (2d Cir. 1981), *petition for cert. filed*, 51 U.S.L.W. 3305 (U.S. Oct. 1, 1982) (No. 82-584) cited by petitioner, where the trial court twice charged the mandatory presumption and, instead of curing the error by the balance of the charge, exacerbated the error by charging that intent's "physical manifestation [is] the accomplishment of the thing determined upon. One's mind is compelled from necessity to refer to the act and

[Footnote continued on following page]

This case presents no issue worthy of this Court's review.

### CONCLUSION

**For these reasons, the petition for a writ of certiorari should be denied.**

Dated: Brooklyn, New York  
March, 1983

Respectfully submitted,

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physical manifestations of the intent exhibited by the results produced is the safest, if not the only, proof of the fact to be ascertained." *Id.* at 715. Furthermore, in *Ramirez*, intent was the crucial issue, unlike the case at bar. See discussion, Point I, *supra*.

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IN THE  
Supreme Court of the United States

October Term, 1982

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA ex rel.  
GERALD JEROME ROCK,

*Petitioner-Appellant,*

vs.

PHILLIP COOMBE, JR., Superintendent,

*Respondent-Appellee.*

SUPPLEMENTAL AND REPLY BRIEF TO PETITION FOR A  
WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT  
OF APPEALS FOR THE SECOND CIRCUIT

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**QUESTION PRESENTED**

**Should the Judgment of the Circuit Court Be Reversed and this Case Remanded for Consideration in Light of *Connecticut v. Johnson*?**

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IN THE  
SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA ex rel. GERALD  
JEROME ROCK,

*Petitioner-Appellant,*

vs.

PHILLIP COOMBE, JR., Superintendent,  
*Respondent-Appellee.*  
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**THE JUDGMENT OF THE CIRCUIT COURT  
SHOULD BE REVERSED AND THIS CASE  
REMANDED FOR CONSIDERATION IN  
LIGHT OF CONNECTICUT v. JOHNSON**

This Court, in recently deciding *Connecticut v. Johnson* (51 LW 4175), has put to rest the question whether a jury instruction in violation of *Sandstrom v. Montana*, 442 U.S. 510 (1979) can ever be considered harmless error. Johnson unequivocally held that, except in rare situations, the *Sandstrom* instruction cannot be considered harmless error.

The judgment of the Court of Appeals herein which held the giving of a *Sandstrom* instruction harmless error must be reversed.

The fact that in *Johnson*, as in the instant case, the jury was otherwise properly instructed on the presumption of innocence, burden of proof and intent did not cure the error.

Such proper instructions could not correct an un-



constitutional charge requiring the jury to draw a conclusive presumption on the issue of intent which is "—the functional equivalent of a directed verdict on that issue" *Johnson* at 4178.

**INTENT WAS NEVER CONCEDED BY THE  
DEFENSE BUT WAS ALWAYS AN ISSUE IN  
THE INSTANT CASE**

*Johnson* recognizes certain 'rare situations' in which a *Sandstrom* instruction could be harmless error. One such situation is defendant conceding the issue of intent. Respondent, despite the explicit finding of the Court of Appeals that intent was prominently in issue (n.7, p. 21A), still maintains that defendant, in offering the defense of non-participation, conceded intent. However, *Johnson* left:

"—it to the lower courts to determine whether, by raising a particular defense or by his other actions, a defendant himself has taken the issue of intent away from the jury" (*supra*, at 4179).

Moreover, *Johnson* speaks of a situation in which the defendant *admitted* the act was intentional as part of his presentation of a certain defense. Appellant made no such admission. Appellant's reliance on a defense not involving the issue of intent did not act to relieve the prosecution of its burden of proving this essential element.

*Johnson* also deals with respondent's argument that the particularly brutal nature of the attack in the instant case, makes defendant's claim of lack of proof of intent to kill inconceivable:

The fact that the reviewing court may review the evidence of intent as overwhelming is then simply irrelevant. To allow a reviewing court to perform the jury's function of evaluating the evidence of intent, when the jury never may have performed that function, would give too much weight to society's interest in punishing the guilty and too little weight to the method by which decision of guilt are to be made.

supra, at 4178.

### **THE CIRCUIT COURT'S JUDGMENT WAS DECIDED ON A FINDING OF HARMLESS ERROR**

Respondent's contention that the Court of Appeals did not reach the question of harmless error but rather concluded that the charge as a whole was constitutional under *Sandstrom v. Montana*, is incorrect.

The Court of Appeals, in its very first paragraph discussing the *Sandstrom* claim, recognized that there was *Sandstrom* error.

The first portion of the statement appears to run afoul of *Sandstrom*. Although it is qualified to some extent by the clause beginning "unless" (cites omitted), we do not regard that qualification sufficient to cure the *Sandstrom* error (supra, p. 19A).

The Court's evaluation of the charge as a whole was merely the method of analysis employed in reaching a final determination on the issue of harmless error.

In the final paragraph of its decision, the Court made it abundantly clear that it found the *Sandstrom* error to be harmless:

In sum, in light of the [trial] court's constant reiteration that the burden remained on the State to prove each element of the crime beyond a reasonable doubt and that intent was to be determined from all of the circumstances, and in the absence of any basis for inferring that the jury fastened upon the presumption language instead of determining intent from all of the circumstances, we conclude that the *Sandstrom* errors were harmless beyond a reasonable doubt. See *Chapman v. California*, 386 U.S. 18 (1967). The judgment of the District Court is affirmed.

supra, p. 24A

It is indisputable that the Circuit Court recognized that the presumption-of-intent instruction was in violation of *Sandstrom v. Montana*. The question they then addressed was whether such a *Sandstrom* instruction, considered in the context of the charge as a whole, was harmless error. Their holding that it was, must be reversed in light of *Connecticut v. Johnson*.

## CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, the judgment of the Circuit Court should be reversed and this case remanded for consideration in light of *Connecticut v. Johnson*.

Respectfully submitted,

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Attorney for Petitioner-Appellant